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September 9, 1999

'The case of the serial dumper'

**Public asked to help EPA find
Missing drums of paint thinner**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EPA's criminal investigators call it the case of the serial dumper.

The agents are referring to their ongoing investigation of a Puget Sound area painting contractor they suspect has been illegally discarding hundreds of containers of dangerous paint thinner along roadsides, on dead-end streets, in vacant lots and at other locations in Pierce, King, Snohomish, Yakima and Kittitas counties. EPA knows the whereabouts of 18 of the illegal dumps. EPA has learned there are at least a dozen more disposal sites, but doesn't know their location. Where are they? EPA is asking the public to help find them.

The paint thinner is toxic, and doubly dangerous because of its ignitability -- as low as one degree Fahrenheit in some cases. If found, the drums should be left undisturbed and their location reported immediately to:

(b) (6), (b) (7) , Criminal Investigation Division
(c)
EPA/Seattle
(206) 553-8306

Generally, the sites that have been found fit a pattern. At just about every location,

(more)

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there are from two to three dozen 5-gallon metal drums. Most of the drums are banded with one, two or three rings of masking tape around the circumference of the entire drum. Many of the drums bear labels that clearly indicate they contain paint thinner.

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EPA suspicions about the painting contractor grew from EPA's examination of paint dealers' sales records for the products that have been found abandoned over the past year at dump sites on both sides of the Cascades. The earliest discoveries -- in Selah and near Ellensburg -- were made in August 1998. Since then, dump sites have been found in Pierce County near Enumclaw; in Lynnwood and Snohomish in Snohomish County; and in King County at various locations, including Redmond and Lake City. The most recent discovery was made last week near University Village in Seattle.

EPA's investigation is still in progress. No charges have been filed, and it's possible -- as often happens -- the investigation may not result in prosecution.

The investigation is being conducted under the authority of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the federal statute regulating hazardous wastes. Under the law, paint thinner must be handled as a hazardous waste. Criminal violations carry penalties of fines or imprisonment, and sometimes both.

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